

Young Voters' Political Efficacy and Electoral Participation in Developing Countries: A Systematic Review

Phoebe Joy N. Deypalubos¹, Asterio G. Olandria²

¹Bachelor of Arts in Political Science, Faculty of Human Sciences and Communication, Davao Oriental State University, Mati City, 8200 Davao Oriental, Philippines

²Faculty of Human Sciences and Communication, Davao Oriental State University, Mati City, 8200 Davao Oriental, Philippines

*Corresponding Author

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.1308000258>

Received: 02 September 2026; Accepted: 07 September 2026; Published: 19 September 2026

ABSTRACT

Young voters are essential to democratic renewal, but political awareness does not always become electoral participation in developing democracies. This systematic literature review synthesized empirical evidence on how political efficacy shapes young voters' electoral participation from 2016 to 2025. Guided by a predefined protocol and a PCC framework, the review examined young voters aged 15-35, political efficacy in internal, external, collective, information, and self-efficacy forms, and developing democratic contexts with functioning electoral systems. Google Scholar searches and snowballing identified a latest screening file of 600 records. After screening, 128 records were retained for appraisal, and 50 core studies were included in final thematic synthesis. Findings show that political efficacy functions as a psychological bridge between political knowledge, digital exposure, civic education, and participation. Internal confidence, information efficacy, media literacy, recruitment networks, and institutional responsiveness strengthen the movement from awareness to voting, registration, turnout, campaign engagement, and online or offline participation. However, weak civic readiness, misinformation, low external efficacy, distrust, and structural inequality interrupt this pathway. The review concludes that youth electoral participation is strongest when young people feel capable of participating and believe that political institutions will respond to their voice.

Keywords: Voter Readiness; Youth Turnout; Civic Education; Media Literacy; Democratic Engagement

INTRODUCTION

Young voters occupy a critical position in democratic politics because they represent both the immediate electorate and the long-term future of democratic participation. In developing democratic countries, however, movement from political awareness to electoral action is often uneven. Saidin and Azrun (2025) show that legal enfranchisement can expand youth interest without automatically producing political readiness, while Ladia and Panao (2023) demonstrate that efficacy helps explain Filipino youth participation across online, interpersonal, and offline settings.

Political efficacy is treated in this review as a psychological mechanism connecting political beliefs to electoral behavior. Internal political efficacy refers to young people's perceived competence to understand and participate in politics, while external political efficacy refers to their belief that political institutions respond to citizens. Hassan et al. (2021a) and Kulachai et al. (2024) measured these efficacy pathways directly, while Arabani et al. (2022) and Myoung and Liou (2022) used related proxies such as voting confidence, readiness, and citizenship self-efficacy. The issue is important because youth participation strengthens electoral legitimacy, representation, and democratic renewal. Yet the evidence shows that exposure to political information is not enough. Hussain et al. (2022) link Facebook use and political self-efficacy to participation, but Tariq et al. (2022) caution that social media effects may be indirect and

conditioned by political orientations. This means that digital engagement, civic education, and political knowledge must be understood through the efficacy mechanisms that make participation psychologically possible.

Conceptual Definitions

This review adopts established definitions to ensure conceptual clarity across the heterogeneous efficacy measures used in the included literature. Political efficacy is defined, following Campbell et al. (1954) and Craig et al. (1990), as an individual's belief in their own capacity to understand and influence the political process. Internal political efficacy is the perceived personal competence to understand political issues and to participate effectively, while external political efficacy is the belief that government institutions and officials are responsive to citizen demands (Craig et al., 1990). These two dimensions are analytically distinct: a young voter may feel personally capable of participating (high internal efficacy) while doubting that institutions will listen (low external efficacy), and the review treats the collapsing of these dimensions into a single general "political confidence" measure as a source of interpretive imprecision in parts of the literature. Beyond this core distinction, the review also tracks three related constructs used by included studies: collective efficacy, the belief that citizens acting together can shape political outcomes; information efficacy, confidence in one's ability to locate and evaluate credible political information (Muralidharan and Sung, 2016); and citizenship or political self-efficacy, confidence in performing specific civic tasks such as registering to vote or evaluating candidates (Myoung and Liou, 2022).

Electoral participation is defined as any behavior directly tied to the electoral process, including voter registration, turnout, voting decisions, and campaign engagement, together with online and offline activities that are conceptually or empirically linked to these outcomes. This definition deliberately excludes broader civic or political participation, such as protest or volunteering, that carries no direct electoral link, consistent with the outcome criteria applied during screening (Table 2). The review also recognizes that "developing countries" is a broad category; the Conceptual framework subsection below specifies the operational criteria used to bound this scope, and the Results are organized by contextual characteristics rather than treating the category as homogeneous.

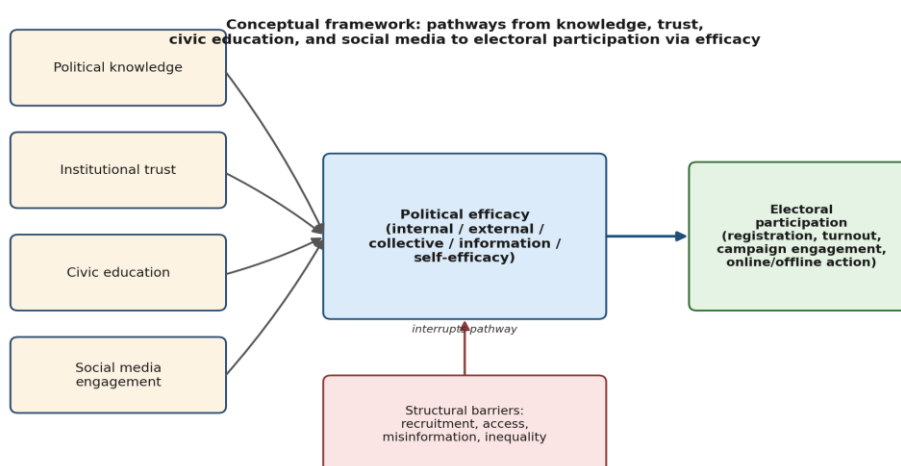


Figure 3. Conceptual framework illustrating relationships among political knowledge, institutional trust, civic education, social media engagement, political efficacy, structural barriers, and electoral participation.

Three gaps guided the review. First, studies on youth participation are scattered across digital media, civic education, political socialization, electoral reform, and voting behavior. Second, many studies examine youth engagement without clearly measuring political efficacy. Third, developing-democracy evidence remains uneven, although studies from the Philippines, Malaysia, Pakistan, Indonesia, Nigeria, Zambia, Tunisia, and related contexts provide important evidence on how efficacy operates under different institutional and information conditions.

This systematic review therefore synthesizes empirical evidence on young voters aged 15-35 in developing democratic contexts. It asks how political efficacy is conceptualized and operationalized, what determinants strengthen efficacy and participation, what barriers interrupt the efficacy-participation pathway, and how digital media, civic education, political socialization, and institutional conditions shape youth electoral engagement.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a systematic literature review design with narrative thematic synthesis. The review was systematic because it followed a predefined protocol, applied explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, documented the screening process, appraised study quality, and synthesized final studies through transparent thematic categories. Page et al. (2021) provided the PRISMA 2020 reporting logic used to structure the study selection process.

The review was narrative rather than meta-analytic because the included studies differed in design, population, country context, efficacy measurement, and participation outcomes. A thematic synthesis was appropriate because the review sought to explain how political efficacy operates across digital, educational, structural, and institutional pathways rather than estimate a single pooled effect.

Conceptual Framework

The review used a PCC framework. The population was young voters aged 15-35, including students, adolescents, and young adults with legal standing or emerging eligibility to vote. The concept was political efficacy in internal, external, collective, information, and self-efficacy forms. The context was developing democratic countries with functioning electoral systems from 2016 to 2025, with carefully retained comparative mechanism anchors when directly relevant.

Because "developing country" is not a self-defining category, two operational criteria bounded inclusion. First, economic status followed the World Bank (2024) classification of low-income, lower-middle-income, and upper-middle-income economies, which covers the Philippines, Malaysia, Pakistan, Indonesia, Nigeria, Thailand, Zambia, Tunisia, and Kazakhstan among the primary-focus contexts in this review. Second, electoral functioning followed cross-national democracy assessments such as the V-Dem Institute (2024)

Democracy Report and Freedom House electoral-process indicators, which the review used to confirm that each primary-focus country held competitive, regularly scheduled elections during the 2016-2025 window, even where broader democratic quality was contested. Studies from high-income, high-democracy-index contexts (e.g., the United States, Germany, South Korea, Belgium, Australia, and the Netherlands) were retained only as comparative mechanism anchors, not as primary evidence for the review's conclusions about developing democracies, and are flagged as such throughout the Results.

Table 1. PCC framework used in the review.

PCC element	Operational definition in this review
Population	Young voters aged 15-35, students, adolescents, or young adults with legal standing to vote or directly relevant electoral participation data.
Concept	Political efficacy, including internal, external, collective, information, self-efficacy, or a valid proxy reflecting political agency, influence, readiness, or confidence.
Context	Developing democratic countries, including the Philippines, Southeast Asia, Africa, South Asia, and comparable contexts with functioning electoral systems from 2016 to 2025.

Literature Search and Study Identification

The search used Google Scholar as the primary source and was supplemented by snowballing through reference lists. Search strings combined terms for young voters, youth, students, adolescents, political efficacy, internal efficacy, external efficacy, political self-efficacy, electoral participation, voting, turnout, registration, voting intention, social media, digital media, and developing democracies. The latest screening file covered Articles 1-600.

The search period covered studies published from 2016 to 2025. Comparative mechanism anchors outside the primary developing-democracy focus were retained only when they clarified efficacy-participation mechanisms, such as information efficacy, voting self-efficacy, or longitudinal youth political development.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Table 2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria used in screening.

Screening element	Included	Excluded
Population and context	Youth, young voters, students, adolescents, or young adults aged 15-35 in developing democratic contexts, or extractable youth evidence.	Studies without youth data, authoritarian or non-electoral contexts, or cases with no transferable electoral relevance.
Concept	Political efficacy or valid agency-related proxies such as voting confidence, civic capacity, readiness, perceived influence, information efficacy, or self-efficacy.	Studies focused only on awareness, candidate choice, general trust, or civic activity without efficacy or agency linkage.
Outcome	Voting, turnout, voting intention, registration, voting decision, campaign engagement, or electoral participation.	Studies focused only on non-electoral civic action, activism, or conceptual participation without electoral relevance.
Study design	Empirical quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, experimental, quasi-experimental, survey, thesis, or case evidence with extractable findings.	Opinion pieces, conceptual essays, narrative reviews, duplicate records, inaccessible full texts, or records with incomplete metadata.

PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram - Young Voters, Political Efficacy, and Electoral Participation (2016-2025)

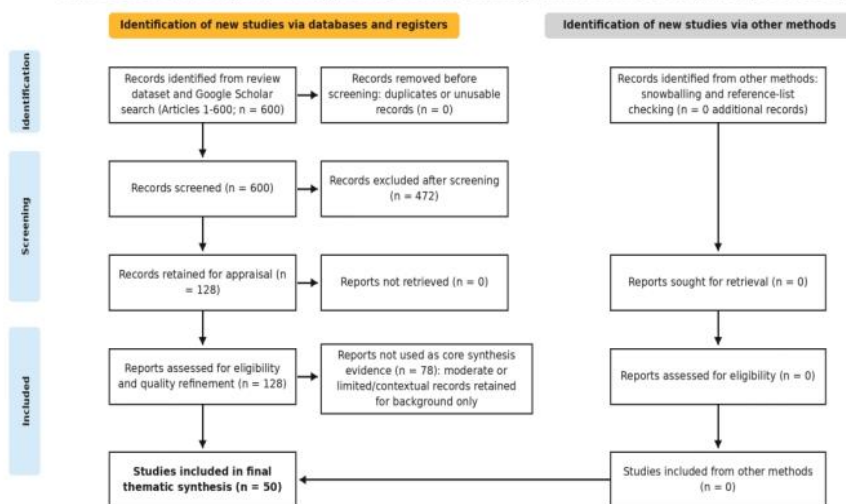


Figure 1. Flow diagram of the literature search using PRISMA 2020 protocol.

Table 3. Search and screening results for the systematic literature review.

PRISMA/refinement stage	Number / description
Records/articles identified from latest screening file	600
Records/articles screened	600
Records excluded after screening	472
Records retained for quality appraisal	128
Strong/Core records identified by appraisal	50
Moderate records	45
Limited/Contextual records	33
Studies included in final thematic synthesis	50
Supplementary/contextual retained records	78

Data Extraction and Quality Appraisal

Data were extracted using a standardized framework that recorded article number, full citation, title, author and year, country or context, population, conceptual focus, study design, data source, methods, theme, objective addressed, main findings, political efficacy role, determinants or barriers, electoral implications, relevance to the review variables, quality notes, inclusion status, and notes.

This structure allowed studies to be compared across methodological, conceptual, and substantive dimensions. Quality appraisal classified the 128 retained records as Strong/Core, Moderate, or Limited/Contextual. Strong/Core studies provided the primary evidence for final synthesis. Moderate studies were used cautiously, while Limited/Contextual studies were retained for background, conceptual, measurement, or contextual support. The final thematic synthesis prioritized the 50 Strong/Core records.

Table 4. Quality appraisal summary of retained records.

Appraisal category	n	Recommended use
Strong/Core	50	Primary evidence for the final thematic synthesis.
Moderate	45	Supporting evidence used cautiously or only when needed for coverage.
Limited/Contextual	33	Background, conceptual, measurement, or contextual support only.
Total retained for appraisal	128	Records assessed after initial screening and before final refinement.

Narrative Synthesis Procedure

The synthesis followed four steps. First, included studies were grouped by country or context, design, efficacy construct, participation outcome, and evidence direction. Second, studies were coded into thematic categories.

Third, the strength of each category was interpreted according to directness of evidence, quality rating, and outcome relevance. Fourth, conclusions were developed by distinguishing direct electoral outcomes from related outcomes such as political interest, online participation, civic readiness, and participation intention.

RESULTS

Characteristics of Included Studies

The final synthesis included 50 core studies. The evidence base covered developing democratic and comparable contexts, including the Philippines, Malaysia, Pakistan, Indonesia, Nigeria, Thailand, Kazakhstan, Zambia, Tunisia, Turkey, Central Asia, and selected mechanism-anchor contexts such as the United States, Germany, South Korea, Belgium, Australia, and the Netherlands. The dominant populations were young voters, university students, adolescents, newly enfranchised voters, and youth social media users.

Political efficacy was operationalized in diverse ways. Ladia and Panao (2023) used internal and external efficacy to explain Filipino youth participation, while Hassan et al. (2021b) connected internal and external efficacy to new-voter decisions. Muralidharan and Sung (2016) emphasized political information efficacy, and Myoung and Liou (2022) used citizenship self-efficacy as a predictor of expected electoral participation. Other studies used voting confidence, readiness, perceived influence, or political agency as valid proxies.

Table 5. Distributional profile of retained and final studies.

Dimension	Category	n	Interpretation
Quality appraisal	Strong/Core	50	39.1
Quality appraisal	Moderate	45	35.2
Quality appraisal	Limited/Contextual	33	25.8
Final synthesis	Core thematic studies	50	100.0
Outcome evidence	Voting, turnout, registration, or voting decision	Several studies	Direct electoral evidence
Outcome evidence	Online/offline participation, intention, political discussion, or readiness	Multiple studies	Participation-related evidence
Major pathway	Digital media and social media	Prominent	Conditional effect
Major pathway	Civic education and political knowledge	Prominent	Efficacy-building effect
Major barrier	Institutional distrust, misinformation, weak readiness, and limited recruitment	Prominent	Translation gap

Table 6. Main evidence clusters in the final included studies.

Cluster	Evidence focus	Direction of evidence
Political efficacy as a psychological mechanism	Internal, external, self-, information-, and collective efficacy; agency, confidence, and readiness.	Strongest explanatory category; efficacy links political knowledge and exposure to participation.
Digital media, social media, and online participation	Facebook, social media political information, online discussion, political expression, and digital mobilization.	Generally supportive but conditional; digital exposure matters most when it strengthens efficacy and information confidence.
Civic education, political knowledge, and	Civic education, school socialization, classroom discussion, voter education,	Positive when programs build confidence, competence, media literacy, and practical

readiness	and applied learning.	electoral readiness.
Structural, institutional, and contextual barriers	Resources, recruitment, institutional responsiveness, distrust, inequality, misinformation, and access.	Barriers interrupt the translation of efficacy into voting or sustained participation.
Electoral participation outcomes and translation gaps	Voting, turnout, intention, registration, campaign engagement, and online/offline participation.	Efficacy is necessary but not sufficient; participation depends on credible information, trust, and opportunity.

Table 7. Findings organized by contextual characteristics of developing-democracy studies.

Contextual dimension	Categories represented in the review	Efficacy-participation pattern observed
Region	Southeast Asia (Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand); South Asia (Pakistan); Sub-Saharan Africa (Nigeria, Zambia); North Africa (Tunisia); Central Asia (Kazakhstan)	Internal-external efficacy distinction most clearly evidenced in Southeast Asian studies; recruitment and institutional-trust barriers most prominent in African studies; civic-education efficacy effects evidenced experimentally in Tunisia and Zambia.
Political system / electoral context	Established multiparty electoral democracies with periodic national elections; newly enfranchised or lowered-voting-age contexts (e.g., Malaysia's Undi18); post-transition or hybrid electoral systems	Newly enfranchised contexts show weaker translation of legal inclusion into readiness (Saidin and Azrun, 2025); temporary disenfranchisement measurably reduces external efficacy (Leininger et al., 2023).
Socioeconomic condition	University and urban-student samples (majority of studies); rural and lower-resource samples (e.g., rural Pakistan); mixed-resource local-government samples (e.g., Katsina, Nigeria)	Resource and recruitment constraints predict participation independently of psychological efficacy in lower-resource settings (Yusuf and Aliyu, 2025); urban student samples show stronger digital-to-efficacy pathways.
Comparative mechanism anchors (non-primary)	High-income, high-democracy-index contexts (United States, Germany, South Korea, Belgium, Australia, Netherlands)	Retained only to clarify general efficacy mechanisms (e.g., information efficacy, longitudinal efficacy development); not used to support conclusions about developing democracies specifically.

Thematic Synthesis of Findings

First, political efficacy emerged as the central psychological mechanism. Kulachai et al. (2024) found that political knowledge increased political efficacy and that efficacy enhanced participation among university students in Bangkok. Similarly, Ladia and Pano (2023) showed that internal efficacy was associated with offline, interpersonal, and online participation among Filipino youth, while external efficacy stimulated online participation.

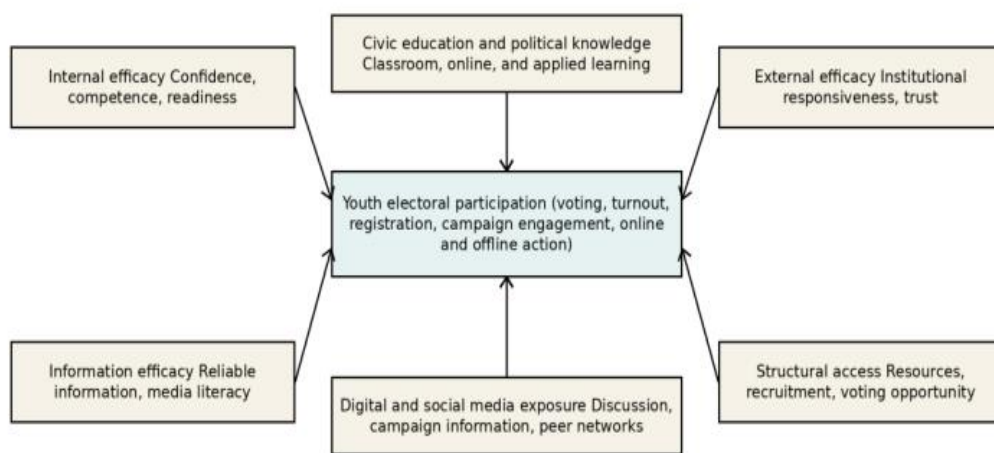
Second, digital media served as both an information channel and a participation arena. Hussain et al. (2022) found that Facebook use and political self-efficacy predicted online political participation, and Diou et al. (2025) reported strong associations among social media use, political participation, political efficacy, and voting behavior in Pakistan. However, Tariq et al. (2022) showed that social media effects can be mediated or moderated by political orientations, indicating that digital exposure alone is not enough.

Third, civic education and political knowledge shaped participation readiness. Akinlabi (2022) found that civic education promoted political knowledge and internal efficacy among Nigerian students, while Myoung and Liou (2022) identified citizenship self-efficacy as an important predictor of expected electoral participation. Finkel et al. (2024) further showed that online civic education can affect efficacy and registration-related outcomes in Tunisia.

Fourth, structural and institutional barriers weakened the efficacy-participation link. Yusuf and Aliyu (2025) found that resources and recruitment significantly predicted youth participation in Katsina Local Government Area, with recruitment emerging as the strongest predictor. Leininger et al. (2023) showed that temporary disenfranchisement reduced external efficacy, demonstrating that institutional experiences can shape young people's belief that participation matters.

Fifth, the evidence revealed an online-to-offline and awareness-to-action gap. Obenza and Rabaca (2024) found that political efficacy mediated the relationship between political awareness and social media political participation among youth in Region XI, Philippines. Tan (2024) similarly found that political efficacy mediated the link between social media political information use and offline, online, and cyber participation. These studies indicate that awareness becomes meaningful only when it develops into efficacy and is connected to concrete electoral opportunities.

Mechanisms Linking Political Efficacy to Youth Electoral Participation



Participation is strongest when internal confidence and external responsiveness are supported by credible information and practical access.

Figure 2. Mechanisms linking political efficacy to youth electoral participation.

DISCUSSION

Political Efficacy is A Bridge Between Awareness and Participation

The central interpretation of this review is that political efficacy explains why political exposure sometimes becomes participation and sometimes does not. Young people may encounter political information through social media, school, family, peers, campaigns, and news, but this information becomes electorally meaningful only when it produces confidence, competence, and perceived influence. In this sense, efficacy is not a background attitude; it is the bridge between awareness and action.

This finding helps clarify why youth participation programs often produce uneven results. Awareness campaigns may increase exposure, but young voters may still hesitate to register, vote, or participate if they do not understand procedures, distrust institutions, or lack confidence in their own political judgment. Effective programs should therefore measure whether youth become more capable and more prepared, not merely whether they have received information.

Internal and External Efficacy Must be Distinguished

The review shows that internal and external efficacy do not perform the same function. Internal efficacy concerns young people's belief that they can understand and participate in politics, while external efficacy concerns whether they believe institutions will respond. Ladia and Panao (2023) and Hassan et al. (2021a,

2021b) are important because they treat these dimensions separately rather than collapsing them into general political confidence.

This distinction is especially important in developing democracies. Young people may feel personally capable but still believe that institutions are unresponsive, corrupt, or distant. Conversely, a responsive institutional environment may not produce participation if young voters lack knowledge or confidence. Youth participation strategies must therefore build both internal competence and external trust.

Digital Media is Conditional Rather Than Automatically Mobilizing

Digital media is central to youth political life, but the evidence does not support a simple claim that social media automatically increases voting. Social media can provide information, discussion, and mobilization opportunities. Yet the online-to-offline gap remains important because online expression is less costly than registration, voting, or campaign work. The strongest digital pathway appears when social media strengthens information efficacy, political discussion, and confidence.

For this reason, digital voter education should not stop at slogans or awareness posts. It should provide reliable information, explain voting procedures, support candidate evaluation, address misinformation, and connect online engagement to offline electoral action. Media literacy becomes part of efficacy-building because young voters must be able to judge whether the information they use is credible enough for participation.

Civic Education Should Build Readiness, Not Only Knowledge

Civic education is most effective when it builds readiness and confidence. The evidence suggests that young people need more than factual knowledge about institutions. They need opportunities to practice democratic discussion, evaluate issues, understand registration and voting procedures, and connect political knowledge to real choices. Applied civic learning, mock elections, voter education, and structured political discussion can make participation more actionable.

This has direct implications for schools, universities, election management bodies, and youth organizations. Civic education should include media verification, issue analysis, candidate comparison, registration assistance, and post-election reflection. The goal is to produce young citizens who are not only aware of democracy but also confident in their ability to participate meaningfully.

Structural Barriers Create Translation Gaps

The review cautions against explaining non-participation as simple apathy. Some young people are informed and interested but still fail to participate because of weak recruitment, limited resources, misinformation, low trust, unclear procedures, or institutional exclusion. Yusuf and Aliyu (2025) show that recruitment can matter more than psychological engagement in some contexts, while Leininger et al. (2023) demonstrate that disenfranchisement can weaken external efficacy.

The implication is that youth participation must be treated as a chain: information builds awareness, awareness builds efficacy, efficacy motivates action, and institutions must provide opportunities for action. When one link is weak, participation becomes fragmented. Strong youth participation strategies must therefore combine education, digital literacy, recruitment, institutional responsiveness, and accessible voting systems.

Factors That Enhance or Constrain Efficacy and Participation

Sections 1-5 identify enhancing and constraining factors throughout the discussion; Table 8 consolidates them explicitly across four domains to make the enhance/constrain distinction easier to apply in program design. Enhancing factors tend to build confidence and connect it to a concrete opportunity to act, while constraining factors either undermine confidence directly or block an otherwise confident young voter from converting intention into action. The clearest policy implication is that removing a single constraint (e.g.,

adding a voter education poster) rarely offsets a missing enhancing factor (e.g., no accessible registration process) in the same domain.

Table 8. Factors that enhance or constrain young voters’ political efficacy and electoral participation.

Domain	Factors that enhance efficacy/participation	Factors that constrain efficacy/participation
Psychological	Internal efficacy (perceived competence); external efficacy (trust that institutions respond); collective and information efficacy (Craig et al., 1990; Hassan et al., 2021a; Kulachai et al., 2024)	Low internal confidence; belief that institutions are unresponsive or corrupt; collapsing internal/external efficacy into vague "political confidence" that masks which dimension is failing
Educational / civic learning	Applied civic education, mock elections, classroom discussion, and voter education that build practical readiness (Akinlabi, 2022; Myoung and Liou, 2022)	Civic education limited to factual knowledge without applied practice; absence of registration or procedural guidance
Digital / media	Social media and Facebook use when it strengthens information efficacy, political discussion, and media literacy (Hussain et al., 2022; Moeller et al., 2018)	Misinformation; social media effects that are indirect or conditioned by prior political orientation, producing online expression without offline action (Tariq et al., 2022)
Institutional / structural	Institutional responsiveness; accessible registration and voting procedures; active recruitment networks	Weak recruitment, limited resources, unclear procedures, and institutional exclusion (Yusuf and Aliyu, 2025); temporary disenfranchisement (Leininger et al., 2023)

Research Gaps and Evidence-Based Recommendations

Four gaps stand out across the included literature. First, few studies measure internal and external efficacy simultaneously alongside a direct electoral outcome; most rely on one dimension or on proxies such as voting confidence or readiness, which limits precise comparison across contexts. Second, longitudinal designs are rare; the large majority of included studies are cross-sectional, so causal claims about efficacy building over time (e.g., through repeated civic education exposure) remain tentative. Third, evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa and fragile or hybrid electoral systems is thinner than evidence from Southeast and South Asia, leaving open how efficacy operates where institutional responsiveness is weaker or contested. Fourth, few studies test structural barriers (recruitment, cost, access) and psychological efficacy within the same model, which makes it difficult to weigh their relative contribution to non-participation.

Based on the synthesized evidence, four recommendations follow. First, researchers should adopt validated internal/external efficacy scales (e.g., Craig et al., 1990) alongside a directly measured electoral outcome, rather than single-item proxies, to improve cross-study comparability. Second, funders and research institutions should support longitudinal or panel designs that track efficacy and participation across at least one electoral cycle. Third, civic education and election-management bodies should design programs that explicitly target both internal competence (practical registration and voting skills, media literacy) and external trust (transparency, responsiveness, feedback channels), since the review shows that strengthening only one dimension leaves the efficacy-participation pathway incomplete. Fourth, future systematic reviews should prioritize expanding coverage of Sub-Saharan African and hybrid-regime contexts and should model structural barriers and psychological efficacy jointly to clarify their relative weight.

LIMITATIONS

Three limitations qualify these conclusions. First, the included studies used different definitions, measurement instruments, and research designs for both efficacy and participation; even after applying the

operational definitions in the Conceptual definitions subsection, this heterogeneity limits direct numerical comparison across studies and means the synthesis is necessarily narrative rather than pooled. Second, the search relied primarily on Google Scholar supplemented by snowballing rather than multiple indexed databases (e.g., Scopus, Web of Science, ProQuest); while Google Scholar offers broad coverage of the regional and grey literature relevant to developing democracies, this single-source strategy may have missed studies indexed only in other databases and constrains the reproducibility of the search. Third, the broad "developing countries" scope, even after applying the World Bank and V-Dem/Freedom House criteria described in the Conceptual framework subsection, still spans considerable variation in political systems, electoral institutions, and socioeconomic conditions; the contextual breakdown in Table 7 mitigates but does not eliminate this variation, and findings from any single country or region should not be generalized to the full set of developing democracies without checking that table.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review examined young voters' political efficacy and electoral participation in developing democratic contexts. The review screened a latest dataset of 600 records, retained 128 records for appraisal, and included 50 core studies in final thematic synthesis. The evidence shows that political efficacy is a central mechanism explaining whether young people translate political awareness, civic education, digital exposure, and political discussion into electoral participation.

The strongest conclusion is that youth electoral participation depends on both internal confidence and external responsiveness. Internal efficacy helps young voters believe that they can understand politics and act competently. External efficacy helps them believe that institutions will listen and that participation matters. Information efficacy, media literacy, civic education, recruitment networks, and accessible electoral procedures further determine whether efficacy becomes voting, turnout, registration, campaign engagement, or other participation outcomes.

The review also shows that digital media and civic education are not automatic solutions. They strengthen participation only when they build confidence, reliable information, readiness, and concrete pathways to action. Structural barriers such as misinformation, low trust, weak recruitment, and limited access can interrupt the movement from awareness to participation. For developing democracies, youth participation programs should therefore strengthen the full pathway from information to efficacy to electoral action.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors acknowledge the academic guidance and support received during the development of this systematic literature review. The authors also recognize the contribution of prior empirical studies on youth political efficacy and electoral participation that formed the evidence base of the review.

Funding

This research received no external funding.

Conflict Of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The authors have no financial, personal, or professional interests that could have inappropriately influenced the design, conduct, or reporting of this review.

Credit Roles

P.D.: Conceptualization; Methodology; Literature search; Screening; Data extraction; Quality appraisal; Formal analysis; Narrative synthesis; Writing - original draft; Visualization; Project administration. A.G.O.: Supervision; Validation; Writing - review and editing. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript in accordance with the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT).

Ethical Statement

This systematic literature review synthesized previously published and academically recognized sources and did not involve direct collection of data from human participants, animals, or biological materials. Therefore, formal ethics review approval was not required. The review nevertheless followed research integrity standards by applying predefined eligibility criteria, documenting study selection through a PRISMA 2020-aligned process, and citing included studies honestly and accurately.

REFERENCES

1. Aftab, N. ul. (2020). Exposure to news and current affairs on private TV channels and political socialization among young, urban Pakistanis (Doctoral dissertation). Freie Universität Berlin.
2. Ahmad, T., Alvi, A., and Ittefaq, M. (2019). The use of social media on political participation among university students: An analysis of survey results from rural Pakistan. *SAGE Open*, 9(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019864484>
3. Akinlabi, A. A. (2022). Civic education and internal political efficacy of students in Oluyole Local Government, Oyo State. *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*, 5(3), 15-27.
4. Arabani, M. W., Bayon-on, A. B. C., Ocampo, J. M. M., and Dagohoy, R. G. (2022). Influence of social networking usage towards youth involvement, attitude and confidence in voting. *Journal of Government and Political Issues*, 2(2), 68-79.
5. Baizhumakzy, Z., Tangkish, N., Mazhinbekov, S., Sarsenbekov, Z., and Korganova, S. (2025). Fostering democratic engagement: Factors shaping youth political participation in Kazakhstan. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 7, 1561187.
6. Bano, S. A., Mubbsher, S., and Zaheer, L. (2024). Exploring the relationship between media literacy and political engagement. *Annals of Human and Social Sciences*, 5(2S), 285-299. [https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2024\(5-II-S\)28](https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2024(5-II-S)28)
7. Bekmagambetov, A., Gainous, J., Wagner, K. M., Sabitov, Z., Rodionov, A., and Kleinstauber, B. (2023). Digital media consumption and voting among Central Asian youth: Why democratic context matters. *Central Asian Survey*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2023.2237519>
8. Campbell, A., Gurin, G., and Miller, W. E. (1954). *The voter decides*. Row, Peterson.
9. Chan, M., Chen, H.-T., and Lee, F. L. F. (2017). Examining the roles of mobile and social media in political participation: A cross-national analysis of three Asian societies using a communication mediation approach. *New Media and Society*, 19(12), 2003-2021. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816653190>
10. Craig, S. C., Niemi, R. G., and Silver, G. E. (1990). Political efficacy and trust: A report on the NES pilot study items. *Political Behavior*, 12(3), 289-314. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00992337>
11. Diemer, M. A., and Rapa, L. J. (2016). Unraveling the complexity of critical consciousness, political efficacy, and political action among marginalized adolescents. *Child Development*, 87(1), 221-238. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12446>
12. Dilsiz, S. (2020). Young people and online political participation in Turkey: The activities of students during the 2015 Turkish general election (Doctoral thesis). Loughborough University. <https://doi.org/10.26174/thesis.lboro.12103272.v1>
13. Diou, N. A., Nizamani, M. Q., Nizamani, F. Q., and Abro, M. U. R. (2025). Impact of social media use on political participation, political efficacy and voting behavior among college students: Evidence from Sukkur Division, Sindh. *Journal of Media Horizons*, 6(3), 600-608. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16081475>
14. Erubami, J. A., Bebenimibo, P., and Ohaja, E. U. (2021). Newspaper exposure, efficacy feeling and political apathy among youths in South-East Nigeria. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 29(3), 1611-1629. <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.29.3.08>
15. Finkel, S. E., Neundorf, A., and Rascon Ramirez, E. (2024). Can online civic education induce democratic citizenship? Experimental evidence from a new democracy. *American Journal of Political Science*, 68(2), 613-630. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12765>
16. Freedom House. (2024). Freedom in the world 2024: The mounting damage of flawed elections and armed conflict. Freedom House.

17. Hassan, M. S., Mohideen, R. S., A'zmi, A. A., Allam, S. N. S., Mustaffa, F., and Ridzuan, A. R. (2021a). The voting decision: Social media use, internal and external efficacy aspects. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(7), 1525-1535. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v11-i7/10362>
18. Hassan, M. S., Ridzuan, A. R., A'zmi, A. A., Chaniago, R. H., and Allam, S. N. S. S. (2021b). Social media use and political efficacy: Structural effect of the voting decision of new voters. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 11(6), 1827-1841. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v11-i6/10205>
19. Hed, N. M. (2017). The dynamics of youth political participation in Southeast Asia: The case of Malaysia (Doctoral thesis). The University of Sheffield.
20. Hussain, S., Kazim, S. M., Arifien, S. U., Azam, A., and Ali, M. (2022). The impact of Facebook use on political self-efficacy and online political participation among young voters. *Journal of Policy Research*, 8(3), 414-418.
21. Hwang, H. (2020). Does social media close the political efficacy gap to participate in politics? In C. Stephanidis and M. Antona (Eds.), *HCI International 2020 - Late Breaking Papers (CCIS 1226)*, pp. 169-176. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-50732-9_23
22. Ida, R., Mashud, M., Saud, M., Yousaf, F. N., and Ashfaq, A. (2025). Politics in Indonesia: Democracy, social networks and youth political participation. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 11(1), 2432071. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2432071>
23. Iqbal, J., Hussain, S., and Iqbal, N. (2022). Impact of social media and political participation on political efficacy of youth in Pakistan. *Journal of Mass Communication*, 27, 96-111.
24. Kanwal, L., Shahid, A. R., and Naeem, M. (2016). Voting behaviour of educated youth in Pakistan: A study of Multan City. *Journal of Research Society of Pakistan*, 53(2), 90-103.
25. Kudrnac, A., and Lyons, P. (2018). Political inequality among youth: Do discussions foster a sense of internal political efficacy? *Young*, 26(5), 484-504. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308817738847>
26. Kulachai, W., Kittisaknawin, C., and Homyamyen, P. (2024). Beyond the ballot: Factors shaping political participation among university students in Bangkok. *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*, 8(13), 8501.
27. Ladia, C. E. P., and Pano, R. A. L. (2023). Filipino youth in viral and virulent times: Unpacking the predictors of youth political participation in the 2022 Philippine elections. *Child and Youth Services*.
28. Leininger, A., Sohnius, M.-L., Faas, T., Rossteutscher, S., and Schafer, A. (2023). Temporary disenfranchisement: Negative side effects of lowering the voting age. *American Political Science Review*, 117(1), 355-361. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000305542200034X>
29. Levy, B. L. M., and Akiva, T. (2019). Motivating political participation among youth: An analysis of factors related to adolescents' political engagement. *Political Psychology*, 40(5), 1039-1055. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12578>
30. Maqsood, M., Gillani, S. F., and Bokhari, S. F. (2024). Analyzing the cultivating impact of political awareness on the political participation and efficacy of Pakistani youth. *Annals of Human and Social Sciences*, 5(2), 586-595. [https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2024\(5-II\)54](https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2024(5-II)54)
31. Mashud, M., Ida, R., and Saud, M. (2023). Political discussions lead to political efficacy among students in Indonesia. *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, 8(1), 184-200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/20578911221143674>
32. Maurissen, L. (2020). Political efficacy and interest as mediators of expected political participation among Belgian adolescents. *Applied Developmental Science*, 24(4), 339-353. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10888691.2018.1507744>
33. McClendon, G., Sperber, E., and Kaaba, O. (2025). Reducing gender gaps in political participation with efficacy promotion: Evidence from a civic education experiment in Zambia. *British Journal of Political Science*, 55, e181, 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000712342510121X>
34. Moeller, J., Kuhne, R., and De Vreese, C. (2018). Mobilizing youth in the 21st century: How digital media use fosters civic duty, information efficacy, and political participation. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 62(3), 445-460. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2018.1451866>
35. Muralidharan, S., and Sung, Y. (2016). Direct and mediating effects of information efficacy on voting behavior: Political socialization of young adults in the 2012 U.S. presidential election. *Communication Reports*, 29(2), 100-114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08934215.2015.1064537>

36. Myoung, E., and Liou, P.-Y. (2022). Adolescents' political socialization at school, citizenship self-efficacy, and expected electoral participation. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 51, 1305-1316. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-022-01581-w>
37. Obenza, B. N., and Rabaca, B. H. D. (2024). The nexus between political awareness and social media political participation as mediated by the political efficacy among youth in Region XI Philippines. *Journal of Contemporary Philosophical and Anthropological Studies*, 2(3), 24-31. <https://doi.org/eiki/10.59652/jcpas.v2i3.276>
38. Ortega, R. (2021). ¡Votemos! Applying a social cognitive lens to young Latinx voter turnout (Doctoral dissertation). University of Oregon.
39. Page, M. J., McKenzie, J. E., Bossuyt, P. M., Boutron, I., Hoffmann, T. C., Mulrow, C. D., Shamseer, L., Tetzlaff, J. M., Akl, E. A., Brennan, S. E., Chou, R., Glanville, J., Grimshaw, J. M., Hróbjartsson, A., Lalu, M. M., Li, T., Loder, E. W., Mayo-Wilson, E., McDonald, S., ... Moher, D. (2021). The PRISMA 2020 statement: An updated guideline for reporting systematic reviews. *BMJ*, 372, n71. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n71>
40. Parth, A.-M., Weiss, J., Firat, R., and Eberhardt, M. (2020). "How Dare You!"-The influence of Fridays for Future on the political attitudes of young adults. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 2, 611139. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2020.611139>
41. Prahara, S. A., and Rachma, N. M. (2023). Political efficacy and political participation in the Islamic Student Association cadres. *Psikis: Jurnal Psikologi Islami*, 9(1), 170-178. <https://doi.org/10.19109/psikis.v9i1.16514>
42. Reichert, F. (2021). How citizenship norms predict participation in different political activities. *Political Science*, 72(3), 245-264. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00323187.2021.1923374>
43. Saidin, M. I. S., and Azrun, N. (2025). Barriers to youth political participation: Insights from Malaysia's lowered voting age policy (Undi18) in the 15th General Election. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 11(1), 2491710.
44. Schmitt, J. B. (2016). Media self-efficacy and internal political efficacy as processes underlying young adults' political participation. *Studies in Communication | Media*, 5(2), 197-222. <https://doi.org/10.5771/2192-4007-2016-2-197>
45. Šerek, J., Macháčková, H., and Macek, P. (2017). The chicken or egg question of adolescents' political involvement: Longitudinal analysis of the relation between adolescents' political participation, political efficacy, and interest in politics. *Zeitschrift für Psychologie*, 225(4), 347-356. <https://doi.org/10.1027/2151-2604/a000297>
46. Sloam, J. (2018). #Votebecause: Youth mobilisation for the referendum on British membership of the European Union. *New Media and Society*, 20(11), 4017-4034. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818766701>
47. Stanley, K. (2017). Social media use, political efficacy and political participation among youth during the 2016 campaign [Senior honors project, East Carolina University]. East Carolina University ScholarShip.
48. Tan, J. J. (2024). Social media political information use and political participation of the Net Generation. *e-Bangi: Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 21(1), 198-211. <https://doi.org/10.17576/ebangi.2024.2101.17>
49. Tariq, R. (2022). Modeling political participation through social media communication effects: The role of partisanship among young voters in Pakistan (Doctoral thesis). Universiti Sains Malaysia.
50. Tariq, R., Zolkepli, I. A., and Ahmad, M. (2022). Political participation of young voters: Tracing direct and indirect effects of social media and political orientations. *Social Sciences*, 11(2), 81. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11020081>
51. V-Dem Institute. (2024). Democracy report 2024: Democracy winning and losing at the ballot. University of Gothenburg.
52. Wahyuni, S., Prihantoro, E., and Ohorella, N. R. (2021). Political efficacy of Jokowi-Amin political marketing in social media in the Indonesia presidential election 2019 in Jabodetabek. *International Journal of Scientific Advances*, 2(3), 325-330.
53. World Bank. (2024). World Bank country and lending groups. World Bank Data Help Desk.

54. Yang, H. C., and DeHart, J. L. (2016). Social media use and online political participation among college students during the US election 2012. *Social Media + Society*, 2(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115623802>
55. Young, D. G., Baum, M. A., and Prettyman, D. (2019). vMOBilize: Gamifying civic learning and political engagement in a classroom context. *Journal of Political Science Education*.
56. Yusuf, A. I., and Aliyu, A. (2025). An exposition of youth and political participation in Katsina Local Government through the lens of Civic Voluntarism Model. *African Journal of Humanities and Contemporary Education Research*, 20(1), 119-133.